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The Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale—A New Measure

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A new measure of generalized expectancy for success was assessed for its psychometric properties. Three samples of Caucasian, middle-class college students participated in the study. The first sample ($n = 100$; 59 females, 41 males) received a preliminary version of the Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale (GESS). Item analysis yielded 30 items that were substantially correlated with the total score but were not significantly related to social desirability. The second sample ($n = 104$; 63 females, 41 males) received the 30-item GESS twice at a 6-week interval. The third sample ($n = 103$; 69 females, 34 males) received the GESS, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, the Internal–External Locus of Control Scale, the Self-Rating Depression Scale, the Depression Inventory, and the Hopelessness Scale. Results indicate that the GESS has acceptable test–retest reliability, high internal consistency, and minimal relationship with social desirability. Predicted relationships between high generalized expectancy for success, depressive symptomatology, and internality were supported. Factor analysis indicated that GESS scores are a function of one general factor. Further construct validation is reviewed, and implications for future use of the GESS are discussed.

One of the key concepts of Rotter's learning theory (Rotter, 1954; Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972) that has been the subject of considerable study in recent years is that of generalized expectancies. The two generalized expectancies that have received the most attention, and for which there are reliable and valid measures, are expectancies regarding internal–external control of reinforcements (Lefcourt, 1976; Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1966, 1975; Strickland, 1977) and interpersonal trust (Rotter, 1967). The purpose of the present ongoing investigation is to construct and validate a measure of a different generalized expectancy—the generalized expectancy for success. This construct can be defined as the expectancy held by an individual that in most situations he/she will be able to attain desired goals. According to social-learning theory, an individual's behavior potential is a function of reinforcement value and expectancies that are determined by a person's reinforcement history for relevant situations. Therefore, when other factors are held constant, the behavior potential for an individual with a high expectancy for success should be greater than that of an individual with a low expectancy for success. Further, since situations vary in the extent to which a person's reinforcement history is relevant, expectancies for success may vary along a continuum from relatively specific to general, as a function of the degree of situational novelty or ambiguity. Numerous studies (Dickstein & Kephart, 1972; Feather, 1966; Feather & Saville, 1967; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1966; Tyler, 1958) have demonstrated that individuals experimentally *given* a high expectancy for success on a certain task or set of tasks are indeed more likely to perform more successfully than those given a

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low expectancy for success. Unlike these experimentally induced task-specific expectancies, however, situations seldom provide individuals with explicit expectancies for success. More commonly, individuals face relatively unfamiliar or ambiguous circumstances for which no highly specific expectancy has been provided or formulated. A person's behavior in such situations is still largely influenced by his/her expectancy for success, but this expectancy increasingly becomes a function of generalized expectancy as the degree of novelty or ambiguity increases. Just as the construction of a measure of internal–external locus of control allows researchers to move from situationally induced skill versus chance expectancies for control to internal–external control as an individual difference variable, the Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale (GESS) allows researchers to explore individual differences as a function of generalized expectancies for success.

A valid and reliable measure of a generalized expectancy for success can facilitate the study of factors in the development of such expectancies, situational characteristics that influence expectancies, and the impact of a generalized expectancy for success on a variety of goal-oriented behaviors and other theoretically related cognitive constructs. Thus, the GESS can potentially enhance prediction and clarify issues of theoretical importance. The development of such a scale depends not only on firm grounding in psychological theory but also on adherence to sound psychometric principles and extensive construct validation.

Method

Subjects

Three samples were obtained, each from large undergraduate psychology classes at a large, northeastern university. Students, predominantly middle-class Caucasians, were given the option to participate in studies of their own choosing for bonus academic points. A preliminary version of the GESS was administered to the first sample ($n = 100$; 59 females, 41 males) during a class period. The second sample ($n = 104$; 63 females, 41 males), solicited in the same manner, was group tested in the 4th and 10th weeks of the semester during the first 20 minutes of the class periods. In the third sample ($n = 103$; 69 females, 34 males), subjects volunteered for one of several small group-testing sessions based on the preliminary description given by the experimenters, one male and one female Caucasian graduate student.

Test Construction

Initially, an attempt was made to construct items that both sampled across situational domains (such as public, private, familial, interpersonal, and work related) and did not specify criteria for success. One hundred fifty items were constructed by the experimenters. The 150 items were then screened for face validity by three psychologists. One hundred four items were selected and subsequently administered to the first sample of 100 subjects. An item analysis yielded 30 items that were substantially correlated with total score ($r > .50$) but were not significantly related to social desirability ($p > .10$) as measured by the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). These 30 items constitute the current version of the measure (see Appendix). All items begin with the same stem phrase: "In the future I expect that I will . . .," which is printed at the top of each page. Responses to items are in Likert format. Subjects are instructed to circle a number on a 5-point scale from 1 (highly improbable) to 5 (highly probable) for each item. Seventeen items are phrased in the positive or success direction and 13 in the negative or failure direction. Items are randomly ordered. The scale is scored additively and in the direction of success, such that a high total scale score indicates a high expectancy for success.

Procedure

The second sample of subjects ($n = 104$) was run during fall 1975 and received only the GESS on two occasions for test–retest reliability purposes. The third sample of subjects, run in groups of 10–15 during spring 1975, received the GESS, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale, Rotter's Internal–External Locus of Control (I–E) Scale (Rotter, 1966), the Self-Rating Depression Scale (Zung, 1965), Beck's Depression Inventory (Beck, 1967), the Hopelessness Scale (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974), and a questionnaire assessing suicidal ideation (Crepeau, Note 1). Responses to the 30 GESS items were intercorrelated, and the resulting matrix was factored by the principal components method. Components were rotated to orthogonal simple structure by means of Kaiser's (1958) varimax method. Minimum eigenvalue for factor rotation was 1.50.

Results

The test–retest correlation coefficient of the GESS using scores taken at a 6-week interval from subjects in the second sample

Table 1
Correlations Between the GESS and Selected Other Measures for the Present Study

Scale	Males		Females	
	n	*r*	*n*	*r*
Social Desirability	34	.15	69	.26*
Self-Rating Depression	26	−.58**	58	−.48**
Depression Inventory	25	−.61**	57	−.54**
Hopelessness	26	−.69**	59	−.31**
Locus of Control	32	−.10	67	−.27*

Note. GESS = Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

who were present for both administrations ($n = 74$; 46 females, 28 males) was .83 overall (.89 for males and .80 for females). Means and standard deviations on the GESS were not significantly different for this sample from those obtained as a function of group testing with additional measures, nor were differences in responding found as a function of sex. Consequently, data from the second and third samples were combined for analyses of psychometric properties ($n = 207$, 132 females, 75 males). The possible range of total scores is 30–150, with higher scores indicating a high expectancy for success. Actual total scores ranged from 65 to 143 for females and from 81 to 138 for males. The mean score for females was 112.32 (mode = 112, $Mdn = 113.14$) and for males, 112.15 (mode = 109, $Mdn = 112.88$). The respective standard deviations were 13.80 and 13.24.

Two measures of internal consistency were computed. The split-half reliability coefficient for odd versus even items, using the Spearman-Brown correction formula, was .90 for females and .91 for males. The correlation between the first 15 items and the last 15 items, again using the Spearman-Brown correction formula, was .82 for females and .83 for males. In view of the fact that all items have a single stem, the high internal consistency is not surprising. However, it should be noted that these reliability coefficients also occur across items that reflect a number of diverse areas.

Correlations with other measures were computed separately for males and females in the third sample. For both sexes it was found that scores on the GESS were correlated negatively and significantly with scores on the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale, the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Beck Hopelessness Scale (see Table 1). Individuals with low expectancies for success were more likely to report depressive symptomatology and to report themselves as feeling hopeless about impending life events. Even though items with high social desirability bias were eliminated from the original item pool, a low but significant correlation between scores on the GESS and scores on the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale was found for females ($r = .25$, $p < .02$) but not for males ($r = .15$, $p > .10$) in the third sample. Also, high GESS scores were significantly correlated with internality as measured by Rotter's I–E scale for females but not for males.

A factor analysis was also computed using the varimax rotation method, which yielded four factors. Variance accounted for by each factor was 63.9%, 13.4%, 12.7%, 10.1% for Factors 1–4, respectively.

Items loading on Factor 1 reflect an individual's sense of general efficacy (Items 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 21, and 22). For example, the two items with the highest loading within Factor 1 were Item 4, "be unable to accomplish my goals" (.56), and Item 21, "succeed at most things I try" (.55).

Factor 2 was composed of Items 14, 17, 24, 25, 26, 29, and 30. The content of these items primarily involves long-range career-oriented expectancies. Items with the highest loading within Factor 2 were Item 26, "attain the career goals I have set for myself" (.56), and Item 30, "achieve recognition in my profession" (.53).

Factor 3 contained items related to personal problem solving (3, 5, 6, 11, 19, 20, 23, 28). Item 5, "have a successful marital relationship" (.59), and Item 29, "be very successful working out my personal life" (.51), loaded highest among the items in the third factor.

Factor 4 consisted of Items 1, 2, 7, 18, and 27 with Item 1, "find that people don't seem to understand what I am trying to say" (.55),

Table 2
Summary of Correlations Between the GESS and Measures of Depressive Affect and Cognition from Other Studies

Scale	Males		Females		Total	
	n	*r*	*n*	*r*	*n*	*r*
Self-Rating Depression						
Strickland (Note 2)	50	−.55***	50	−.43***		
Crepeau (Note 1)	67	−.74**	107	−.62***		
Koerner (1977)					120	−.47***
With *SD* partialed out					120	−.44***
Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist						
Strickland (Note 2)						
Anxiety	50	−.33**	50	−.27*		
Depression	50	−.34**	50	−.20		
Hostility	50	−.03	50	−.04		
Crepeau (Note 1)						
Depression	67	−.66***	107	−.45***		
Koerner (1977)						
Anxiety					120	−.43***
Depression					120	−.37***
Hostility					120	−.41***
Suicidal Ideation						
Crepeau (Note 1)	67	−.33**	107	−.48***		

Note. GESS = Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

and Item 18, "find that no matter how hard I try, things just don't turn out the way I would like" (.54), having the highest loadings on the fourth factor. Although effort rather than outcome seems to characterize several items of Factor 4, this is not a consistent theme. In addition, all of the items in Factor 4 are phrased negatively, which suggests a possible overriding response bias. The final factor, then, is not easily interpretable.

Although the factor analysis did yield a moderately interpretable factor structure, other results militate against assuming the simple factor structure noted above. First, Factor 1 accounted for a disproportionately high percentage of the variance. In addition, 15 items, half of the scale items, loaded greater than ±.30 on at least two and in some cases three factors. The considerable overlap in loadings on the four factors suggests that the factors are not independent. The small sample size and lack of uniformly interpretable factors further limit the validity of a simple structure. Based on current data, the presence of one general factor is tentatively reasonable. Subsequent factor analyses using larger samples and separate analyses for males and females may prove more conclusive.

Discussion

Results indicate that the GESS has an acceptable test–retest reliability, high internal consistency, and a minimal relationship with social desirability. Preliminary factor analysis did not yield strong evidence of a simple subscale structure. It appears that GESS scores are largely a function of one factor reflecting a sense of general efficacy.

A number of theoretical approaches to depression—learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975), social learning theory (Phares, 1972), and Beck's (Beck, 1967, 1976) model among them—focus on the importance of the depressive's negative cognitive set. To estab-

Table 3
Summary of Correlations Between the GESS and Measures of Internal–External Control of Reinforcement from Other Studies

Scale	Males		Females		Total	
	n	*r*	*n*	*r*	*n*	*r*
Strickland (Note 2) (Crandall I–E)[a]						
I–E for positive events	50	.32**	50	.43***		
I–E for negative events	50	−.17	50	.00		
I–E Total	50	.07	50	.26*		
Crepeau (Note 1) (Collins' I–E)						
Difficult/Easy World	67	−.35**	107	−.45***		
Just/Unjust World	67	−.20*	107	−.20*		
Predictable/Unpredictable World	67	−.30**	107	−.36***		
Politically Responsive World	67	−.16	107	−.18		
Personal Control	67	−.42***	107	−.54***		
I–E Total	67	−.48***	107	−.48***		
Koerner (Note 3) (Collins' I–E)						
I–E Total					120	−.41***

Note. GESS = Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale. I–E = internal–external.
[a] Crandall's scale is scored in internal direction.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

lish the construct validity of the GESS, an assessment of its scores in relation to measures of depressive cognition is crucial. As expected, the GESS was significantly related to measures of depression, with persons who express high expectancies for success being less likely to report themselves as depressed. This relationship has been further corroborated with samples of college students (see Table 2; Koerner, 1977; Crepeau, Note 1; Strickland, Note 2). The significant negative correlations with the Hopelessness Scale obtained in the present investigation provide further support for the construct validity of the GESS, since Beck et al. (1974) have demonstrated that their scale is a quantitative measure of pessimism. Extreme pessimism or helplessness is also correlated with suicide (Minkoff, Bergman, Beck, & Beck, 1973). In Crepeau's (Note 1) study, retrospective self-report data on the frequency of suicidal ideation among college students correlated negatively and significantly with GESS scores. Thus, low scores on the GESS are related consistently to measures of negative cognition, depressive affect and symptomatology, and suicidal ideation.

Anxiety, frequently a concomitant of depression (Beck, 1967, 1976) and an anticipated correlate of low generalized expectancy for success, related negatively and significantly to GESS scores in both Strickland's (Note 2) and Koerner's (1977) studies. An individual with a low generalized expectancy for success tends to report greater anxiety as measured by the Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist (MAACL; Zuckerman, Lubin, & Robins, 1965). Additionally, Koerner reported a significant negative correlation between scores on the Hostility subscale of the MAACL and GESS scores. As in the female sample of the present study, social desirability was positively correlated with GESS scores for the combined male and female samples of Koerner's study ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). However, after partialing out the effects of social desirability, the relationship between GESS and depression scores remained significant ($r = -.44$, $p < .001$).

Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between an individual's belief in internal control of reinforcement and successful coping behaviors (Lefcourt, 1976; Phares, 1976, Strickland, 1977; Gilmore,

Note 3). In the present study, high GESS scores were related to internality for female subjects but not for males. Other studies by Strickland (Note 2), Crepeau (Note 1), and Koerner (1977) demonstrated the relationship between GESS and internality for both sexes (see Table 3). Crepeau used the Collins (1974) and Levenson and Miller (1976) subscales derived from the factor analyzed I–E scale to measure locus of control. Crepeau found GESS scores negatively and significantly related to each of the five subscales (difficult/easy world, just/unjust world, predictable/unpredictable world, politically responsive world, and personal control) for female subjects and all but the fourth subscale (politically responsive world) for male subjects (trend, $p < .10$). Using an academic achievement measure that distinguishes between positive and negative events of locus of perceived responsibility (Crandall, Note 4), Strickland reported significant negative correlations between GESS scores and total I–E scores and internality for positive but not negative events for female subjects. For males, GESS scores were negatively and significantly correlated with I–E scores on the positive, but not the negative events, subscale. In summary and as expected, GESS scores and a belief in internal control of reinforcement appear to be related both at a general level and across specific dimensions. These relationships seem somewhat attenuated among male subjects. Discriminant validity is demonstrated by the low and generally insignificant correlations between GESS scores and scores on the Social Desirability Scale and the MAACL Hostility subscale.

Support for the construct validity is provided by Fibel (1976). She investigated the relationship between an individual's generalized expectancy for success, task-specific expectancies for success, and differential responses to a learned helplessness paradigm with college females. Data analysis showed a significant positive correlation between GESS scores and specific expectancies for success in novel and ambiguous situations and relatively lower correlations as specific situational information was acquired. Thus, as postulated, one's specific or immediate expectancy increasingly becomes a function of one's generalized expectancy as the degree of novelty or ambiguity is amplified.

The choice of a measure of generalized versus specific expectancy for success must be determined by the level of analysis desired. Measures of task-specific expectancies will be of greater predictive utility when the level of analysis is task focused. For example, then, the intent of predicting successful performances on mechanical tasks is better determined by a measure of expectancy tailored to mechanics than by a generalized measure. Similarly, measures of specific expectancies within a single need area, such as academic achievement, are preferable when one's predictive purposes are tied to that need area. A generalized measure will be most useful when the level of analysis is broadly defined as an assessment across need areas and situations or in novel or ambiguous circumstances.

Several cogent issues remain unresolved. The degree of relationship between GESS and measures of other personality variables such as self-esteem has not been investigated. The validity of this instrument for populations other than college students must be demonstrated. Additional factor analyses are needed to support the unidimensionality of the measure. The influence of social desirability on GESS scores while moderate for a measure of a culturally highly valued construct must be taken into account in future work with the scale. Nonetheless, at this point, the GESS appears to be theoretically well-founded, empirically sound, and shows promise of predictive utility. Additionally, its briefness and ease of administration further enhance its value. Anticipated are relationships between the GESS and achievement, assertiveness, risk taking, persuasibility, interpersonal skills, and social competence. Further, a measure of this possibly potent cognitive-mediating variable may have implications for predicting psychological well-being, particularly vis-à-vis depressive symptomatology that is typically characterized by negative expectations and low motivation.

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Appendix

The Hale-Fibel Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale

This is a questionnaire to find out how people believe they will do in certain situations. Each item consists of a 5-point scale and a belief statement regarding one's expectations about events. Please indicate the degree to which you believe the statement would apply to you personally by circling the appropriate number. [1 = highly improbable, 5 = highly probable.] Give the answer that you truly believe *best applies to you* and not what you would like to be true or think others would like to hear. Answer the items *carefully,* but do not spend too much time on any one item. Be sure to find an answer for *every item,* even if the statement describes a situation you presently do not expect to encounter. Answer as if you were going to be in each situation. Also try to respond to each item independently when making a choice; do not be influenced by your previous choices.

In the future I expect that I will

1. find that people don't seem to understand what I am trying to say.
2. be discouraged about my ability to gain the respect of others.
3. be a good parent.
4. be unable to accomplish my goals.
5. have a successful marital relationship.
6. deal poorly with emergency situations.
7. find my efforts to change situations I don't like are ineffective.
8. not be very good at learning new skills.
9. carry through my responsibilities successfully.
10. discover that the good in life outweighs the bad.
11. handle unexpected problems successfully.
12. get the promotions I deserve.
13. succeed in the projects I undertake.
14. not make any significant contributions to society.
15. discover that my life is not getting much better.
16. be listened to when I speak.
17. discover that my plans don't work out too well.
18. find that no matter how hard I try, things just don't turn out the way I would like.
19. handle myself well in whatever situation I'm in.
20. be able to solve my own problems.
21. succeed at most things I try.
22. be successful in my endeavors in the long run.
23. be very successful working out my personal life.
24. experience many failures in my life.
25. make a good impression on people I meet for the first time.
26. attain the career goals I have set for myself.
27. have difficulty dealing with my superiors.
28. have problems working with others.
29. be a good judge of what it takes to get ahead.
30. achieve recognition in my profession.

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